



Background

Following the publication of the Annual GP Patient survey, the practice manager at Red House Medical Centre contacted us seeking some support. Their survey results indicated that patient satisfaction regarding access to surgery and involvement in appointments could be improved. While patients reported issues, the survey did not provide insights into the specific causes of their dissatisfaction, as it only included closed questions.

To support the surgery team, it was decided that we would carry out several visits to the surgery and spend some time talking with patients about their experiences of contacting and accessing the practice and their appointment with the clinicians. We aimed to further explore potential reasons for their dissatisfaction, allowing the practice and its team to identify ways to utilise this information to enhance services for their patients and improve their experiences.

Brief and methodology

To capture patients' experiences of accessing the surgery and their levels of involvement in their care, Healthwatch developed a survey for patients to complete, with support from the practice manager.

The survey was divided into three main sections. The first section focused on patients' experiences of contacting the surgery through the available methods and assessed the ease of doing so. The second section specifically addressed their experiences with the reception team, and the third examined the appointment itself.

A mix of quantitative and qualitative questions was used to gather comprehensive feedback. Healthwatch staff visited the practice on multiple occasions and at different times throughout the week to gather insights. During these visits, Healthwatch staff talked with patients in the waiting area about their experiences.

To ensure that all patients could share their opinions, even if they are not present at the practice on the days of our visits, the receptionist provided surveys to patients visiting the practice when Healthwatch was not on site. Additionally, Healthwatch shared an online version of the survey through its social media platforms.

Findings – In total 43 surveys were received (Please note not all surveys were fully complete)

Section 1 – Contacting the surgery

- How easy is it to contact the surgery by using the following?

	Very easy	Easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Difficult	Very difficult	I didn't know this is an option	Prefer not to say
By telephone	21%	30%	16%	21%	12%	0%	0%
By e-consult	23%	31%	13%	18%	3%	5%	8%
By using the website chatbot	8%	0%	16%	3%	8%	49%	16%
By visiting the surgery in person	45%	33%	8%	5%	8%	3%	0%

Overall, the results above show a mixed response from patients depending on the method used when contacting the surgery. Visiting the surgery in person is considered the easiest option, with 45% rating it very easy and 33% easy.

"It is very easy to walk through the door and speak face-to-face."

Website chatbots are the least known option, with 49% of patients stating they were unaware this option was available when booking appointments.

"I didn't know this is an option."

Section 1 - Contacting the surgery

Patients found booking via telephone to be relatively accessible, with 21% rating it as very easy and 30% as easy. However, 33% of patients still rated their experience when accessing the surgery by phone as difficult or very difficult.

“Long waiting times over the phone. The office does not call me back sometimes, or no updates. I have never heard of the chatbot service.”

“Phone is difficult as options are not exhaustive and don't cover things like 'call-back.”

“Easy to get in contact. Would score higher if you could still get an appointment via the phone.”

Some patients are familiar with e-consult as an access option and found it to be relatively accessible, with 23% finding it very easy and 31% finding it easy. We received many comments about the use of this option.

“Booking on e-consult is easy. However, sometimes just ringing someone is better.”

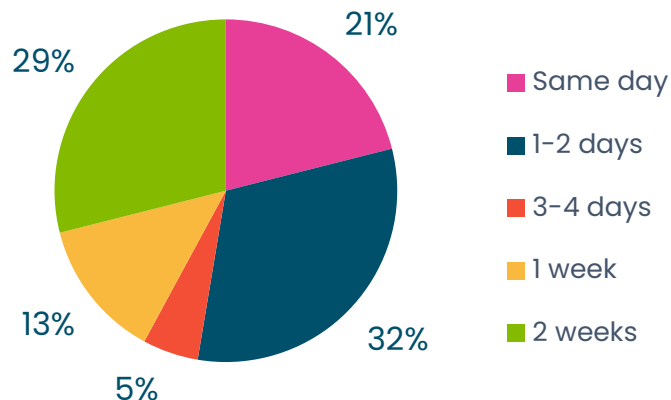
“E-consult is easily navigated.”

“E-consult option is really good.”

“The e-consult is easy, and you get a quick response.”

Section 1 - Contacting the surgery

• Generally, how long do you have to wait for your appointment?



The results show that most patients either received an appointment either the same day (21%) within 1-2 days (32%) or 2 weeks (29%).

Patients were asked if they felt this was satisfactory. Those patients who gave additional comments mostly reported they felt the length of the wait was satisfactory and appropriate to the situation:

"Yes - I believe they always try to get you seen where needed."

"Yes, suitable most of the time."

"Yes - most times GP will see you the same day, and for children too."

"Yes, anything major is seen the same day; anything else is usually the next day."

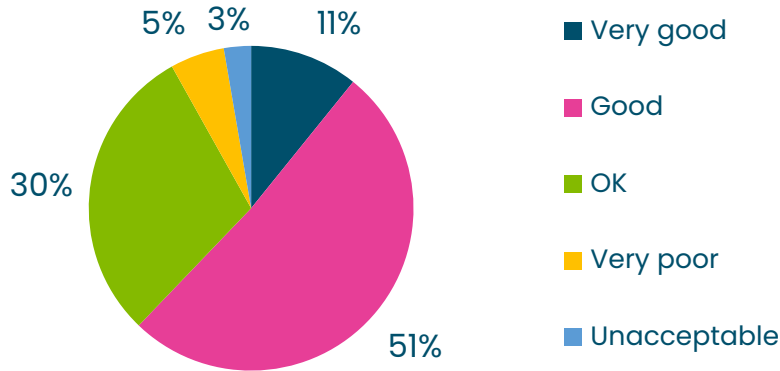
"I think this is satisfactory for non-urgent appointments. The practice does offer same-day appointments for urgent cases."

"Sometimes the wait is too long depending on the issue."

"I waited weeks at times, but also a same-day appointment today."

Section 1 - Contacting the surgery

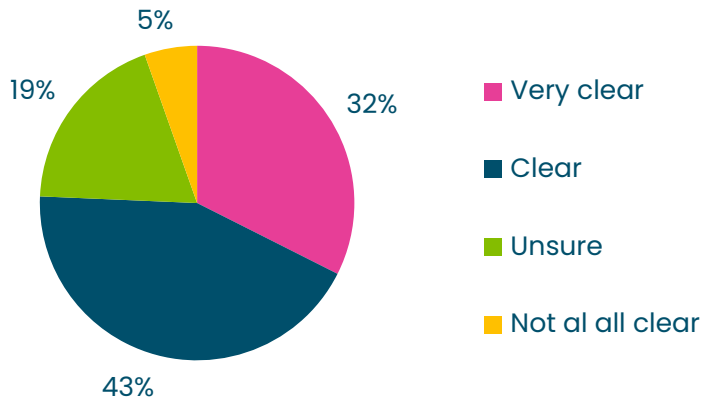
• How would you rate your overall experience of contacting Red House Medical Centre?



The results show that most patients (51%) rate their overall experience as good, and (30%) said OK.

Very few patients gave a rating of very poor or unacceptable.

• Generally, after contacting the GP surgery, are you clear on what will happen next?



The results show that, after contacting surgery, 32% and 43% of patients are very clear and clear about what will happen next.

However, some patients were unsure (19%) or not at all clear (5%) about what would happen next.

Section 2 – Reception staff

Overall, how would you rate the service you receive from the reception staff at the surgery?

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know/not sure
The reception staff are welcoming	59%	22%	14%	5%	0%	0%
The reception staff are helpful	61%	22%	11%	6%	0%	0%

The responses above show that overall, reception staff are perceived positively, with most patients reporting that they are always or usually welcoming and helpful. Negative responses (rarely or never) are minimal at 5% or less.

While many patients describe reception staff as friendly, respectful, and helpful, there is some level of inconsistency. Some report that it depends upon whom you speak to.

“Staff are always willing to help.”

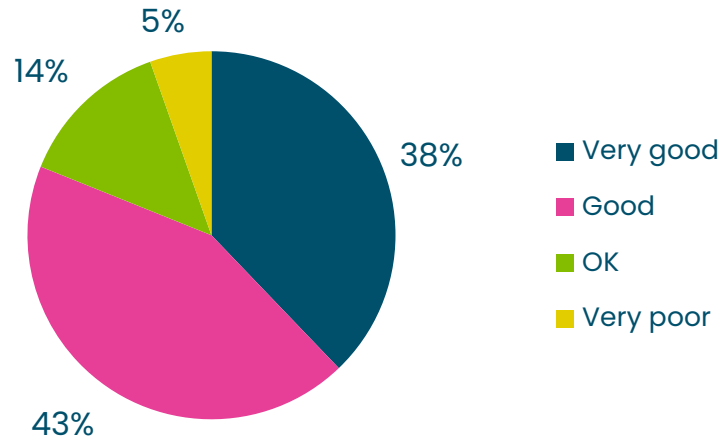
“It depends who you speak to.”

“I have always found the reception staff to be very helpful and welcoming.”

“There was once a receptionist who said to me when I was trying to make an appointment, “That I can't be that bad if I'm at work.”

Section 2 – Reception staff

Overall, how would you rate the service from the reception staff at the surgery?



The results show that most patients rate the service from reception as good (43%) and very good (38%).

Some patients gave a rating of OK (14%), and a few patients (5%) said that it was very poor.

Patients gave a rating on the reception staff and gave some mixed comments, stating that;

“The receptionist helps as much as possible and is always cheerful.”

“Staff are always willing to help.”

“It depends on whom you speak to.”

“Sometimes it feels like they talk down to you.”

“Had a couple of staff who are not helpful, sometimes abrupt.”

Section 3 – Your appointment

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know/not sure
I feel involved as much as I want to be in the decision about my care and treatment	58%	19%	6%	14%	0%	3%
I feel that I am listened to and healthcare professionals talk to me in an understandable way	53%	25%	6%	16%	0%	0%

The results above show that overall, when asked about their appointment and how involved they are in decisions about their care and treatment, they were perceived to be positive. 58% of patients rated that they always felt involved in decisions, and 53% always felt listened to by healthcare professionals.

When asked to explain their ratings, those who provided additional comments were almost evenly divided. Some expressed that they feel heard and understand the explanations given, while others indicated that they do not share that sentiment.

“Always explain things clearly.”

“Because they listen to me and the advice has been good.”

“GPs and nursing staff explain clearly on what will happen.”

“Sometimes it feels like, because they have limited time for the appointment, it feels rushed.”

“It depends on the doctor.”

“Sometimes I don't understand the jargon used.”

“I often don't feel clear and feel they aren't interested.”

Additional comments

Is there anything else you would like to say about Red House Medical Centre?

Patient comments reflect a combination of positive and negative experiences with the practice. Positive comments included:

"...the nurse is lovely."

"I have been with this surgery for a long time, and I'm generally happy with the service."

"Always try to meet my needs."

"Good surgery in general."

"Feels like family and friends compared with other practices being offered more than I ever have."

"Staff are always friendly and welcoming. They listen to your problem and give advice."

Negative comments are related to challenges patients have experienced in surgery, from booking an appointment to seeing a doctor.

"To be able to get an appointment when needed. Always a long wait."

"The practice could do with some upgrades so you could get more support from all staff and doctors. Rather than long waits or being told "we can't help you", and manners."

"These are my suggestions: Staff Bank, Autism Learning and readjustment, Voluntary opportunities, Autism Learning Display Training tier 1 and 2, CPR training, 1-to-1 doctor's appointment, Family parent conversation, Carer's Centre Information and Advanced care planning."

"Sometimes the system can be down. If they can leave a message to let someone know, it will help a lot."

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the patients we spoke to, we have summarised what we found to be working well and areas that could be improved.

What is working well

- **Face-to-Face interaction**

Many patients find it very easy and reassuring to walk into the surgery and speak directly to the reception staff. In-person booking is considered the most straightforward method.

- **Use of E-consult**

For some patients this method of booking appointments is well received it is easy to use, convenient, and can give quick responses.

- **Staff friendliness and professionalism**

Receptionists, nurses, and doctors are frequently described as helpful and welcoming staff, with clear communication during appointments. Patients also frequently describe the practice as friendly, supportive, and generally good overall.

- **Good access to urgent appointments**

Patients often say urgent appointments are available quickly, with several comments stating they are seen the same day when the issue is urgent.

The overall theme is that urgent cases are prioritised better than routine ones, although a few people still say access is inconsistent.

What needs improving

- **Inconsistency in patient experiences of booking appointments**

Patients have reported varied experiences when accessing the surgery, depending on the method they use. The findings show that differences are often observed when contacting the surgery by phone or in person, which can vary based on the staff member assisting them.

- **Increased awareness of available methods**

Many patients we spoke to were unaware of the full range of services available to them, including how to access these options and the benefits they offer. There is a significant opportunity to enhance awareness of various options, such as the chatbot and e-consult services, for those patients who may wish to utilise them. In addition, it would be helpful to inform patients about peak times and alternative booking options, including enhanced access appointments, which could help patients make more informed choices and reduce pressures on the practice during busy/peak periods.

- **Inconsistency in patient experiences of appointments**

Patients are mostly positive about appointment communication, with several comments saying staff explain things clearly, listen, ask questions, and give helpful advice.

The main concerns are inconsistent communication, medical jargon not always being easy to understand, and appointments sometimes feeling rushed.

Overall, this section suggests patients generally feel heard and supported, but there are recurring concerns about clarity and consistency of explanation.

healthwatch Sunderland

Healthwatch Sunderland
The Co-op Centre
Whitehouse Road
Hendon
Sunderland
SR2 8AH

www.healthwatchsunderland.com

t: 0191 5147145

e: healthwatchsunderland@pcp.uk.net

X [@HWSunderland](https://twitter.com/HWSunderland)

f [Facebook.com/HWSunderland](https://www.facebook.com/HWSunderland)

@ [Instagram.com/healthwatchsunderland](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchsunderland)